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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 001029

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/28/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: POPULAR AZERBAIJANI MOSQUE MAY REOPEN

REF: A. BAKU 00779
[1](#)B. BAKU 00912

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Rob Garverick for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) On October 27, a Baku municipal court ruled in favor of the Abu Bakr Mosque in its case against the local Narimanov police station, which sought to keep the mosque closed. The decision may allow the mosque's religious leaders to re-open. Per reftels, local authorities closed the popular Sunni mosque shortly after it was bombed on August 17. The mosque ostensibly was closed after local residents raised safety and sanitation concerns with local authorities, although the State Committee on Work with Religious (SCWRA) suggested the mosque was only temporarily closed while the security services conducted their investigation of the August 17 bombing. The mosque's imam, Gamet Suleymanov, was quoted in local press as saying the court's decision was "fair," although he regretted that the mosque had to rely on the judicial system to get the mosque re-opened.

[1](#)2. (C) Local Islamic expert Aysel Vazirova told us Abu Bakr attendees have been congratulating one another about the court decision via email listservs. Based on her conversations with Abu Bakr attendees, many thought the mosque would eventually be re-opened after the presidential election. Vazirova speculated that while the community's leadership initially was very concerned about the closure, someone in the GOAJ probably unofficially assured them the mosque would re-open after the election.

[1](#)3. (C) In early October, Javanshir Suleymanov, the lawyer representing the Abu Bakr mosque, told us the government was sending confusing signals about the potential for re-opening the mosque. Specifically, different GOAJ entities were sending mixed signals. For example, the Ministry of National Security (MNS) reportedly told Suleymanov that they had no problems with the mosque re-opening, whereas SCWRA and local police officials were less transparent in responding to Suleymanov's requests for information on when and under what circumstances the mosque could be re-opened.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT: Despite the court decision, it is unclear when the mosque will re-open. The mosque lost a separate court case against SCWRA on October 20. Poloff walked through the neighborhood surrounding the mosque on October 26, and police were stationed outside the mosque, which remained closed. Based on what Vazirova and other local contacts are reporting -- alongside the GOAJ's long-standing

policy choice of keeping the mosque open to keep tabs on the Salafi community -- the Embassy is optimistic that the mosque will re-open in the next few weeks. The GOAJ's apparent mixed signals about the mosque tracks with what other local contacts are reporting and the broader bureaucratic culture in Azerbaijan. It appears that most GOAJ entities were confused and afraid to stick out their necks on behalf of the Abu Bakr mosque, waiting instead for an order from higher authorities.

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